

Vagabonds of Space

A Complete Novelette

By Harl Vincent

From the depths of the Sargasso Sea of Space came the thought-warning, "Turn back!" But Carr and his Martian friend found it was too late!

CHAPTER I

The Nomad

Gathered around a long table in a luxuriously furnished director's room, a group of men listened in astonishment to the rapid and forceful speech of one of their number.

"I tell you I'm through, gentlemen," averred the speaker. "I'm fed up with the job, that's all. Since 2317 you've had me sitting at the helm of International Airways and I've worked my fool head off for you. Now—get someone else!"

"Made plenty of money yourself, didn't you, Carr?" asked one of the directors, a corpulent man with a self-satisfied countenance.

"Sure I did. That's not the point. I've done all the work. There's not another executive in the outfit whose job is more than a title, and you know it. I want a change and a rest. Going to take it, too. So, go ahead with your election of officers and leave me out."

"Your stock?" Courtney Davis, chairman of the board, sensed that Carr Parker meant what he said.

"I'll hold it. The rest of you can vote it as you choose: divide the proxies pro rata, based on your individual holdings. But I reserve the right to dump it all on the market at the first sign of shady dealings. That suit you?"

The recalcitrant young President of International Airways had risen from the table. The chairman attempted to restrain him.

"Come on now, Carr, let's reason this out. Perhaps if you just took a leave of absence—"

"Call it anything you want. I'm done right now."

Carr Parker stalked from the room, leaving eleven perspiring capitalists to argue over his action.

He rushed to the corridor and nervously pressed the call button of the elevators. A minute later he emerged upon the roof of the Airways building, one of the tallest of New York's mid-town skyscrapers. The air here, fifteen hundred feet above the hot street, was cool and fresh. He walked across the great flat surface of the landing stage to inspect a tiny helicopter which had just settled to a landing. Angered as he was, he still could not resist the attraction these trim little craft had always held for him. The feeling was in his blood.

His interest, however, was short lived and he strolled to the observation aisle along the edge of the landing stage. He stared moodily into the heavens where thousands of aircraft of all descriptions sped hither and yon. A huge liner of the Martian route

was dropping from the skies and drifting toward her cradle on Long Island. He looked out over the city to the north: fifty miles of it he knew stretched along the east shore of the Hudson. Greatest of the cities of the world, it housed a fifth of the population of the United States of North America; a third of the wealth.

Cities! The entire world lived in them! Civilization was too highly developed nowadays. Adventure was a thing of the past. Of course there were the other planets, Mars and Venus, but they were as bad. At least he had found them so on his every business trip. He wished he had lived a couple of centuries ago, when the first space-ships ventured forth from the earth. Those were days of excitement and daring enterprise. Then a man could find ways of getting away from things—next to nature—out into the forests; hunting; fishing. But the forests were gone, the streams enslaved by the power monopolies. There were only the cities—and barren plains. Everything in life was made by man, artificial.

Something drew his eyes upward and he spotted an unusual object in the heavens, a mere speck as yet but drawing swiftly in from the upper air lanes. But this ship, small though it appeared, stood out from amongst its fellows for some reason. Carr rubbed his eyes to clear his vision. Was it? Yes—it was—surrounded by a luminous haze. Notwithstanding the brilliance of the afternoon sun, this haze

was clearly visible. A silver shimmering that was not like anything he had seen on Earth. The ship swung in toward the city and was losing altitude rapidly. Its silvery aura deserted it and the vessel was revealed as a sleek, tapered cylinder with no wings, rudders or helicopter screws. Like the giant liners of the Interplanetary Service it displayed no visible means of support or propulsion. This was no ordinary vessel.

Carr watched in extreme interest as it circled the city in a huge spiral, settling lower at each turn. It seemed that the pilot was searching for a definite landing stage. Then suddenly it swooped with a rush. Straight for the stage of the Airways building! The strange aura reappeared and the little vessel halted in mid-air, poised a moment, then dropped gracefully and lightly as a feather to the level surface not a hundred feet from where he stood. He hurried to the spot to examine the strange craft.

"Mado!" he exclaimed in surprise as a husky, bronzed Martian squeezed through the quickly opened manhole and clambered heavily to the platform. Mado of Canax—an old friend!

"Devils of Terra!" gasped the Martian, his knees giving way, "—your murderous gravity! Here, help me. I've forgotten the energizing switch."

Carr laughed as he fumbled with a mechanism that was strapped to the Martian's back. Mado, who tipped the scales at over two hundred pounds on his own planet, weighed nearly six hundred here. His legs simply couldn't carry the load!

"There you are, old man." Parker had located the switch and a musical purr came from the black box between the Martian's broad shoulders. "Now stand up and tell me what you're doing here. And what's the idea of the private ship? Come all the way from home in it?"

His friend struggled to his feet with an effort, for the field emanating from the black box required a few seconds to reach the intensity necessary to counteract two-thirds of the earth's gravity.

"Thanks Carr," he grinned. "Yes, I came all the way in that bus. Alone, too—and she's mine! What do you think of her?"

"A peach, from what I can see. But how come? Not using a private space-flier on your business trips, are you?"

"Not on your life! I've retired. Going to play around for a few years. That's why I bought the Nomad."

"Retired! Why Mado, I just did the same thing."

"Great stuff! They've worked you to death. What are you figuring on doing with yourself?"

Carr shrugged his shoulders resignedly. "Usual thing, I suppose. Travel aimlessly, and bore myself into old age. Nothing else to do. No kick out of life these days at all, Mado, even in chasing around from planet to planet. They're all the same."

The Martian looked keenly at his friend. "Oh, is that so?" he said. "No kick, eh? Well, let me tell you, Carr Parker, you come with me and we'll find something you'll get a kick out of. Ever seen the Sargasso Sea of the solar system? Ever been on one of the asteroids? Ever seen the other side of the Moon—Uranus—Neptune—Planet 9, the farthest out from the sun?"

"No-o." Carr's eyes brightened somewhat.

"Then you haven't seen anything or been anywhere. Trouble with you is you've been in the rut too long. Thinking there's nothing left in the universe but the commonplace. Right, too, if you stick to the regular routes of travel. But the *Nomad's* different. I'm just a rover when I'm at her controls, a vagabond in space—free as the ether that

surrounds her air-tight hull. And, take it from me, there's something to see and do out there in space. Off the usual lanes, perhaps, but it's there."

"You've been out—how long?" Carr hesitated.

"Eighty Martian days. Seen plenty too." He waved his arm in a gesture that seemed to take in the entire universe.

"Why come here, with so much to be seen out there?"

"Came to visit you, old stick-in-the-mud," grinned Mado, "and to try and persuade you to join me. I find you footloose already. You're itching for adventure; excitement. Will you come?"

Carr listened spellbound. "Right now?" he asked.

"This very minute. Come on."

"My bag," objected Carr, "it must be packed. I'll need funds too."

"Bag! What for? Plenty of duds on the *Nomad*—for any old climate. And money—don't make me laugh! Vagabonds need money?" He backed toward the open manhole of the *Nomad*, still grinning.

Carr hesitated, resisting the impulse to take Mado at his word. He looked around. The landing stage had been deserted, but people now were approaching. People not to be tolerated at the moment. He saw Courtney Davis, grim and determined. There'd be more arguments, useless but aggravating. Well, why not go? He'd decided to break away. What better chance? Suddenly he dived for the manhole of Mado's vessel; wriggled his way to the padded interior of the air-lock. He heard the clang of the circular cover. Mado was clamping it to its gasketed seat.

"Let's go!" he shouted.

CHAPTER II

Into the Heavens

The directors of International Airways stared foolishly when they saw Carr Parker and the giant Martian enter the mysterious ship which was a trespasser on their landing stage. They gazed incredulously as the gleaming torpedo-shaped vessel arose majestically from its position. There was no evidence of motive power other than a sudden radiation from its hull plates of faintly crackling streamers of silvery light. They fell back in alarm as it pointed its nose skyward and accelerated with incredible rapidity, the silver energy bathing them in its blinding luminescence. They burst forth in excited recrimination when it vanished into the blue. Courtney Davis shook his fist after the departing vessel and swore mightily.

Carr Parker forgot them entirely when he clambered into the bucket seat beside Mado, who sat at the Nomad's controls. He was free at last: free to probe the mysteries of outer space, to roam the skies with this Martian he had admired since boyhood.

"Glad you came?" Mado asked his Terrestrial friend.

"You bet. But tell me about yourself. How you've been and how come you've rebelled, too? I haven't seen you for a long time, you know. Why, it's been years!"

"Oh, I'm all right. Guess I got fed up with things about the same way you did. Knew last time I saw you that you were feeling as I did. That's why I came after you."

"But this vessel, the *Nomad*. I didn't know such a thing was in existence. How does it operate? It seems quite different from the usual ether-liners."

"It's a mystery ship. Invented and built by Thrygis, a discredited scientist of my country. Spent a fortune on it and then went broke and killed himself. I bought it from the executors for a song. They thought it was a pile of junk. But the plans and notes of the inventor were there and I studied 'em well. The ship is a marvel, Carr. Utilizes gravitational attraction and reversal as a propelling force and can go like the Old Boy himself. I've hit two thousand miles a second with her."

"A second! Why, that's ten times as fast as the regular liners! Must use a whale of a lot of fuel. And where do you keep it? The fuel, I mean."

"Make it right on board. I'm telling you Carr, the *Nomad* has no equal. She's a corker."

"I'll say she is. But what do you mean—make the fuel?"

"Cosmic rays. Everywhere in space you know. Seems they are the result of violent concentrations of energy that cause the birth of atoms. Thrygis doped out a collector of these rays that takes 'em from their paths and concentrates 'em in a retort where there's a spongy metal catalyst that never deteriorates. Here there is a reaction to the original action out in space and new atoms are born, simple ones of hydrogen. But what could be sweeter for use in one of our regular atomic motors? The energy of disintegration is used to drive the generators of the artificial gravity field, and there you are. Sounds complicated, but really isn't. And nothing to get out of whack either."

"Beats the rocket motors and bulky fuel of the regular liners a mile, doesn't it? But since when are you a navigator, Mado?"

"Don't need to be a navigator with the *Nomad*. She's automatic, once the controls are set. Say we wish to visit Venus. The telescope is sighted on that body and the gravity forces adjusted so we'll be attracted in that direction and repelled in the opposite direction. Then we can go to bed and forget it. The movement of the body in its orbit makes no difference because the force follows wherever it goes. See? The speed increases until the opposing forces are equal, when

deceleration commences and we gradually slow down until within ten thousand miles of the body, when the *Nomad* automatically stops. Doesn't move either, until we awaken to take the controls. How's that for simple?"

"Good enough. But suppose a wandering meteor or a tiny asteroid gets in the way? At our speed it wouldn't have to be as big as your fist to go through us like a shot."

"All taken care of, my dear Carr. I told you Thrygis was a wiz. Such a happenstance would disturb the delicate balance of the energy compensators and the course of the *Nomad* would instantly alter to dodge the foreign object. Once passed by, the course would again be resumed."

"Some ship, the *Nomad*!" Carr was delighted with the explanations. "I'm sold on her and on the trip. Where are we now and where bound?"

Mado glanced at the instrument board. "Nearly a million miles out and headed for that Sargasso Sea I told you about," he said. "It isn't visible in the telescope, but I've got it marked by the stars. Out between the orbits of Mars and Jupiter, a quarter of a billion miles away. But we'll average better than a thousand miles a second. Be

there in three days of your time."

"How can there be a sea out there in space?"

"Oh, that's just my name for it. Most peculiar thing, though. There's a vast, billowy sort of a cloud. Twists and weaves around as if alive. Looks like seaweed or something; and Carr, I swear there are things floating around in it. Wrecks. Something damn peculiar, anyway. I vow I saw a signal. People marooned there or something. Sorta scared me and I didn't stay around for long as there was an awful pull from the mass. Had to use full reversal of the gravity force to get away."

"Now why didn't you tell me that before? That's something to think about. Like the ancient days of ocean-going ships on Earth."

"Tell you? How could I tell you? You've been questioning me ever since I first saw you and I've been busy every minute answering you."

Carr laughed and slid from his seat to the floor. He felt curiously light and loose-jointed. A single step carried him to one of the stanchions of the control cabin and he clung to it for a moment to regain his equilibrium.

"What's wrong?" he demanded. "No internal gravity mechanism on the *Nomad*?"

"Sure is. But it's adjusted for Martian gravity. You'll get along, but it wouldn't be so easy for me with Earth gravity. I'd have to wear the portable G-ray all the time, and that's not so comfortable. All right with you?"

"Oh, certainly. I didn't understand."

Carr saw that his friend had unstrapped the black box from his shoulders. He didn't blame him. Glad he wasn't a Martian. It was mighty inconvenient for them on Venus or Terra. Their bodies, large and of double the specific gravity, were not easily handled where gravity was nearly three times their own. The Venusians and Terrestrials were more fortunate when on Mars, for they could become accustomed to the altered conditions. Only had to be careful they didn't overdo. He remembered vividly a quick move he had made on his first visit to Mars. Carried him twenty feet to slam against a granite pedestal. Bad cut that gave him, and the exertion in the rarefied atmosphere had him gasping painfully.

He walked to one of the ports and peered through its thick window. Mado was fussing with the controls. The velvety blackness of the

heavens; the myriad diamond points of clear brilliance. Cold, too, it looked out there, and awesomely vast. The sun and Earth had been left behind and could not be seen. But Carr didn't care. The heavens were marvelous when viewed without the obstruction of an atmosphere. But he'd seen them often enough on his many business trips to Mars and Venus.

"Ready for bed?" Mado startled him with a tap on the shoulder.

"Why—if you say so. But you haven't shown me through the *Nomad* yet."

"All the time in the universe for that. Man, don't you realize you're free? Come, let's grab some sleep. Need it out here. The ship'll be here when we wake up. She's flying herself right now. Fast, too."

Carr looked at the velocity indicator. Seven hundred miles a second and still accelerating! He felt suddenly tired and when Mado opened the door of a sleeping cabin its spotless bunk looked very inviting. He turned in without protest.

CHAPTER III

A Message

The days passed quickly, whether measured by the Martian chronometer aboard the *Nomad* or by Carr's watch, which he was regulating to match the slightly longer day of the red planet. He was becoming proficient in the operation of all mechanisms of the ship and had developed a fondness for its every appointment.

Behind them the sun was losing much of its blinding magnificence as it receded into the ebon background of the firmament. The Earth was but one of the countless worlds visible through the stern ports, distinguishable by its slightly greenish tinge. They had reached the vicinity of the phenomenon of space Mado had previously discovered. Carr found himself seething with excitement as the *Nomad* was brought to a drifting speed.

Mado, who had disclaimed all knowledge of navigation, was busy in the turret with a sextant. He made rapid calculations based on its indications and hurried to the controls.

"Find it?" Carr asked.

"Yep. Be there in a half hour."

The nose of the vessel swung around and Mado adjusted the gravity energy carefully. Carr glued his eye to the telescope.

"See anything?" inquired Mado.

"About a million stars, that's all."

"Funny. Should be close by."

Then: "Yes! Yes! I see it!" Carr exulted. "A milky cloud. Transparent almost. To the right a little more!"

The mysterious cloud rushed to meet them and soon was visible to the naked eye through the forward port. Their speed increased alarmingly and Mado cut off the energy.

"What's that?" Mado stared white-faced at his friend.

"A voice! You hear it too?"

"Yes. Listen!"

Amazed, they gazed at each other. It was a voice; yet not a sound came to their ears. The voice was in their own consciousness. A mental message! Yet each heard and understood. There were no words, but clear mental images.

"Beware!" it seemed to warn. "Come not closer, travelers from afar.

There is danger in the milky fleece before you!"

Mado pulled frantically at the energy reverse control. The force was now fully repelling. Still the billowing whiteness drew nearer. It boiled and bubbled with the ferocity of one of the hot lava cauldrons of Mercury. Changing shape rapidly, it threw out long streamers that writhed and twisted like the arms of an octopus. Reaching. Searching for victims!

"God!" whispered Carr. "What is it?"

"Take warning," continued the voice that was not a voice. "A great ship, a royal ship from a world unknown to you, now is caught in the grip of this mighty monster. We can not escape, and death draws quickly near. But we can warn others and ask that our fate be reported to our home body."

A sudden upheaval of the monstrous mass spewed forth an object that bounced a moment on the rippling surface and then was lost to view. A sphere, glinting golden against the white of its awful captor.

"The space-ship!" gasped Mado. "It's vanished again!"

They hurtled madly in the direction of this monster of the heavens,

their reverse energy useless.

"We're lost, Mado." Carr was calm now. This was excitement with a vengeance. He'd wished for it and here it was. But he'd much rather have a chance to fight for his life. Fine ending to his dreams!

"Imps of the canals! The thing's alive!" Mado hurled himself at the controls as a huge blob of the horrible whiteness broke loose from the main body and wobbled uncertainly toward them. A long feeler reached forth and grasped the errant portion, returning it with a vicious jerk.

"Turn back! Turn back!" came the eery warning from the golden sphere. "All is over for us. Our hull is crushed. The air is pouring from our last compartment. Already we find breathing difficult. Turn back! The third satellite of the fifth planet is our home. Visit it, we beseech you, and report the manner of our going. This vile creature of space has power to draw you to its breast, to crush you as we are crushed."

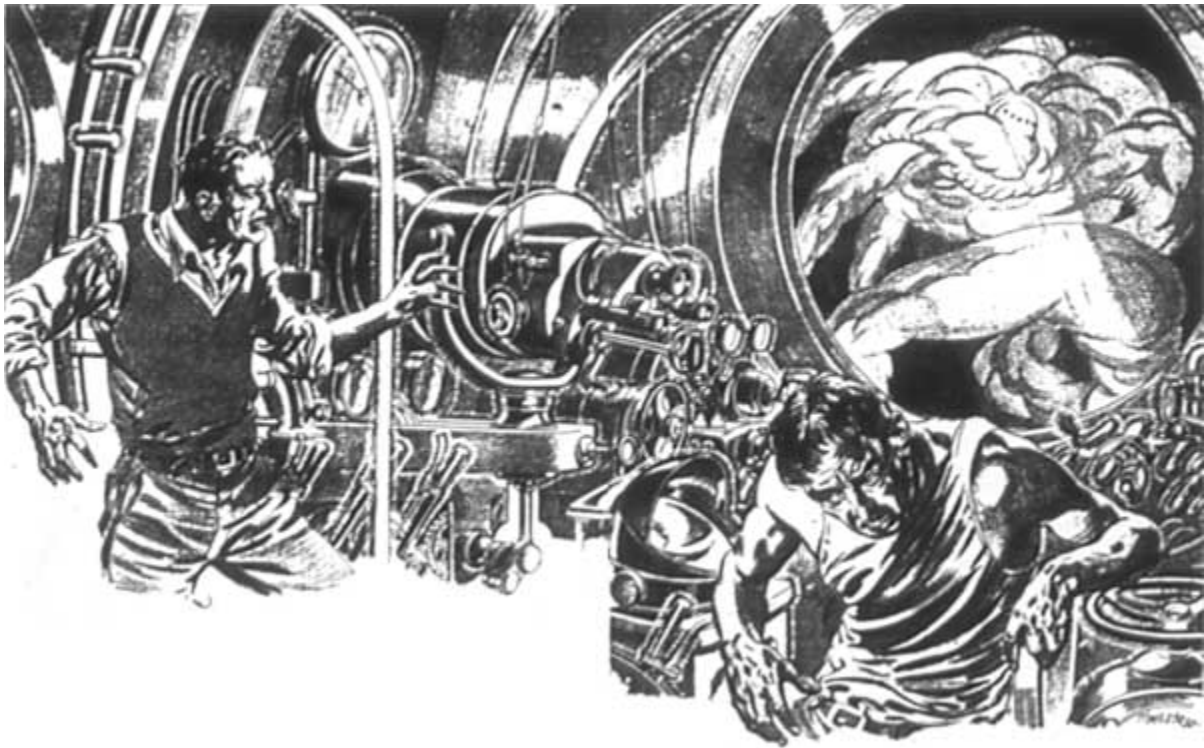
The *Nomad* lurched and shuddered, drawn ever closer to the horrid mass of the thing. A gigantic jellyfish, that's what it was, a hundred miles across! Carr shivered in disgust as it throbbed anew, sending out those grasping streamers of its mysterious material. As the

Nomad plunged to its doom with increasing speed, Mado tried to locate some spot in the universe where an extreme effect could be obtained from the full force of the attracting or repulsive energies. They darted this way and that but always found themselves closer to the milky billows that now were pulsating in seeming eagerness to engulf the new victim.

Once more came the telepathic warning, "Delay no longer. It is high time you turned back. You must escape to warn our people and yours. Even now the awful creature has us in its vitals, its tentacles reaching through our shattered walls, creeping and twining through the passages of our vessel. Crushing floors and walls, its demoniac energies heating our compartment beyond belief. We can hold out no longer. Go! Go quickly. Remember—the third satellite of the fifth planet—to the city of golden domes. Tell of our fate. Our people will understand. You—"

The voice was stilled. Mado groaned as if in pain and Carr saw in that instant that each knob and lever on the control panel glowed with an unearthly brush discharge. Not violet as of high frequency electricity, but red. Cherry red as of heated metal. The emanations of the cosmic monster were at work on the *Nomad*. A glance through the forward port showed they had but a few miles to go. They'd be in the clutches of the horror in minutes, seconds, at the rate they were

traveling. Mado slumped in his seat, his proud head rolling grotesquely on his breast. He slid to the floor, helpless.



Carr went mad with fury. It couldn't be! This thing of doom was a creature of his imagination! But no—there it was, looming close in his vision. By God, he'd leave the mark of the *Nomad* on the vicious thing! He remembered the ray with which the vessel was armed. He was in the pilot's seat, fingering controls that blistered his hands and cramped his arms with an unnameable force. He'd fight the brute! Full energy—head on—that was the way to meet it. Why bother with the reversal? It was no use.

A blood-red veil obscured his vision. He felt for the release of the ray; pulled the gravity energy control to full power forward. In a daze, groping blindly for support, he waited for the shock of impact. The mass of that monstrosity must be terrific, else why had it such a power of attraction for other bodies? Or was it that the thing radiated energies unknown to science? Whatever it was, the thing would know the sting of the *Nomad's* ray. Whatever its nature, animate or inanimate, it was matter. The ray destroyed matter. Obliterated it utterly. Tore the atoms asunder, whirling their electrons from their orbits with terrific velocity. There'd be some effect, that was certain! No great use perhaps. But a crater would mark the last resting place of the *Nomad*; a huge crater. Perhaps the misty whiteness would close in over them later. But there'd be less of the creature's bulk to menace other travelers in space.

His head ached miserably; his body was shot through and through with cramping agonies. The very blood in his veins was liquid fire, searing his veins and arteries with pulsing awfulness. He staggered from the control cabin; threw himself on his bunk. The covers were electrified and clung to him like tissue to rubbed amber. The wall of the sleeping cabin vibrated with a screeching note. The floors trembled. Madness! That's all it was! He'd awaken in a moment. Find himself in his own bed at home. He'd dreamed of adventures before now. But never of such as this! It just couldn't happen! A

nightmare—fantasy of an over-tired brain—it was.

There came a violent wrench that must have torn the hull plates from their bracings. The ship seemed to close in on him and crush him. A terrific concussion flattened him to the bunk. Then all was still. Carr Parker's thoughts broke short abruptly. He had slipped into unconsciousness.

CHAPTER IV

Europa

When Carr opened his eyes it was to the normal lighting of his own sleeping cabin. The *Nomad* was intact, though an odor of scorched varnish permeated the air. They were unharmed—as yet. He turned on his side and saw that Mado was moving about at the side of his couch. Good old Mado! With a basin of water in his hand and a cloth. He'd been bathing his face. Brought him to. He sat up just as Mado turned to apply the cloth anew.

"Good boy, Carr! All right?" smiled the Martian.

"Little dizzy. But I'm okay." Carr sprang to his feet where he wobbled uncertainly for a moment. "But the *Nomad*?" he asked. "Is she—are we safe?"

"Never safer. What in the name of Saturn did you do?"

Carr passed his hand across his eyes, trying to remember. "The D-ray," he said. "I turned it on and dived into the thing with full attraction. Then—I forget. Where is it—the thing, I mean?"

"Look!" Mado drew him to the stern compartment.

Far behind them there shone a misty wreath, a ring of drifting matter that writhed and twisted as if in mortal agony.

"Is that it?"

"What's left of it. You shot your way through it; through and out of its influence. D-ray must have devitalized the thing as it bored through. Killed its energies—for the time, at least."

Already, the thing was closing in. Soon there would be a solid mass as before. But the *Nomad* was saved.

"How about yourself?" asked Carr anxiously. "Last time I saw you you were flat on the floor."

"Nothing wrong with me now. A bit stiff and sore, that's all. When I came to I put all the controls in neutral and came looking for you. I was scared, but the thing's all over now, so let's go."

"Where?"

"Europa."

"Where's that?"

"Don't you remember? The third satellite of the fifth planet. That's Europa, third in distance from Jupiter, the fifth planet. It is about the size of Terra's satellite—your Moon. We'll find the city of the golden

domes."

Carr's eyes renewed their sparkle. "Right!" he exclaimed. "I forgot the mental message. Poor devils! All over for them now. But we'll carry their message. How far is it?"

"Don't know yet till I determine our position and the position of Jupiter. But it's quite a way. Jupiter's 483 million miles from the Sun, you know."

"We're more than half way, then."

"Not necessarily. Perhaps we're on the opposite side of the sun from Jupiter's present position. Then we'd have a real trip."

"Let's figure it out." Carr was anxious to be off.

Luck was with them, as they found after some observations from the turret. Jupiter lay off their original course by not more than fifteen degrees. It was but four days' journey.

Again they were on their way and the two men, Martian and Terrestrial, made good use of the time in renewing their old friendship and in the study of astronomy as they had done during the first leg of their journey. Though of widely differing build and

nature, the two found a close bond in their similar inclinations. The library of the *Nomad* was an excellent one. Thrygis had seen to that, all of the voice-vision reels being recorded in Cos, the interplanetary language, with its standardized units of weight and measurement.

The supplies on board the *Nomad* were ample. Synthetic foods there were for at least a hundred Martian days. The supply of oxygen and water was inexhaustible, these essential items being produced in automatic retorts where disassembled electrons from their cosmic-ray hydrogen were reassembled in the proper structure to produce atoms of any desired element. Their supply of synthetic food could be replenished in like manner when necessity arose. Thrygis had forgotten nothing.

"How do you suppose we'll make ourselves understood to the people of Europa?" asked Carr, when they had swung around the great orb of Jupiter and were headed toward the satellite.

"Shouldn't have any trouble, Carr. Believe me, to a people who have progressed to the point of sending mental messages over five hundred miles of space, it'll be a cinch, understanding our simple mental processes. Bet they'll read our every thought."

"That's right. But the language. Proper names and all that. Can't get

those over with thought waves."

"No, but I'll bet they'll have some way of solving that too. You wait and see."

Carr lighted a cigar and inhaled deeply as he gazed from one of the ports. He'd never felt better in his life. Always had liked Martian tobacco, too. Wondered what they'd do when the supply ran out. One thing they couldn't produce synthetically. The disc of the satellite loomed near and it shone with a warmly inviting light. Almost red, like the color of Mars, it was. Sort of golden, rather. Anyway, he wondered what awaited them there. This was a great life, this roaming in space, unhampered by laws or conventions. The *Nomad* was well named.

"Wonder what they'll think of our yarn," he said.

"And me. I wonder, too, what that ungodly thing was back there. The thing that is now the grave of some of their people. And what the golden sphere was doing so far from home. It's a mystery."

They had gone over the same ground a hundred times and had not reached a satisfactory conclusion. But perhaps they'd learn more in the city of golden domes.

"Another thing," said Carr, "that's puzzled me. Why is it that Europa has not been discovered before this; that it's inhabited, I mean?"

"Rocket ships couldn't carry enough fuel. Besides, our astronomers've always told us that the outer planets were too cold; too far from the sun."

"That is something to think about. Maybe we'll not be able to stand the low temperature; thin atmosphere; low surface gravity."

"We've our insulated suits and the oxygen helmets for the first two objections. The G-rays'll hold us down in any gravity. But we'll see mighty soon. We're here."

They had entered the atmosphere as they talked and the *Nomad* was approaching the surface in a long glide with repulsion full on. It was daytime on the side they neared. Pale daylight, but revealing. The great ball that was Jupiter hung low on the horizon, its misty outline faintly visible against the deep green of the sky.

The surface over which they skimmed was patchworked with farmlands and crisscrossed by gleaming ribbons. Roadways! It was like the voice-vision records of the ancient days on Mars and Terra before their peoples had taken to the air. Here was a body where a

person could get out in the open; next to nature. They crossed a lake of calm green water fringed by golden sands. At its far side a village spread out beneath them and was gone; a village of broad pavements and circular dwellings with flat rooms, each with its square of ground. A golden, mountain range loomed in the background; vanished beneath them. More fields and roads. Everywhere there were yellows and reds and the silver sheen of the roads. No green save that of the darkening sky and the waters of the streams and ponds. It was a most inviting panorama.

Occasionally they passed a vessel of the air—strange flapping-winged craft that soared and darted like huge birds. Once one of them approached so closely they could see its occupants, seemingly a people similar to the Venusians, small of stature and slender.

"How in time are we to find this city of golden domes?" Carr ejaculated.

As if in answer to his question there came a startling command, another of the mental messages.

"Halt!" it conveyed to their mind. "Continue not into our country until we have communed with you."

Obediently Mado brought up the nose of the *Nomad* and slowed her down to a gradual stop. They hovered at an altitude of about four thousand feet, both straining their ears as if listening for actual speech.

"It is well," continued the message. "Your thoughts are good. You come from afar seeking the city of golden domes. Proceed now and a fleet of our vessels will meet you and guide you to our city."

"Now wouldn't that jar you?" whispered Carr. "Just try to get away with anything on this world."

Mado laughed as he started the generators of the propelling energy. "I'd hate to have a wife of Europa," he commented. "No sitting-up-with-sick-friend story could get by with her!"

CHAPTER V

The City of Golden Domes

With the *Nomad* cruising slowly over the surface of the peaceful satellite, Mado sampled the atmosphere through a tube which was provided for that purpose. The pressure was low, as they had expected; about twenty inches of mercury in the altitude at which they drifted. But the oxygen content was fairly high and the impurities negligible. A strange element was somewhat in evidence, though Mado's analysis showed this to be present in but minute quantity. They opened the ports and drew their first breath of the atmosphere of Europa.

"Good air, Carr." Mado was sniffing at one of the ports. "A bit rare for you, but I think you'll get along with it. Temperature of forty-five degrees. That's not so bad. The strangest thing is the gravity. This body isn't much more than two thousand miles in diameter, yet its gravity is about the same as on Venus—seven eighths of that of Terra. Must have a huge nickel-iron core."

"Yes. It'll be a cinch for me. But you, you big lummo—it's the G-ray for you as long as we're here."

"Uh-huh. You get all the breaks, don't you?"

Carr laughed. He was becoming anxious to land. "What sort of a reception do you suppose we'll get?" he said.

"Not bad, from the tone of that last message. And here they come, Carr. Look—a dozen of them. A royal reception, so far."

Suddenly they were in the midst of a flock of great birds; birds that flapped their golden wings to rise, then soared and circled like the gulls of the terrestrial oceans. And these mechanical birds were fast. Carr and Mado watched in fascination as they strung out in V formation and led the way in the direction of the setting sun. Six, seven hundred miles an hour the *Nomad's* indicator showed, as they swung in behind these ships of Europa.

They crossed a large body of water, a lake of fully five hundred miles in width. More country then, hardly populated now and with but few of the gleaming roadways. The sun had set, but there was scarcely any diminution of the light for the great ball that was Jupiter reflected a brilliance of far greater intensity than that of the full Moon on a clear Terrestrial night. A marvelous sight the gigantic body presented, with its alternate belts of gray-blue and red and dazzling white. And it hung so low and huge in the heavens that it seemed one had but to stretch forth a hand to touch its bright surface.

Another mountain range loomed close and was gone. On its far side there stretched the desolate wastes of a desert, a barren plain that extended in all directions to the horizon. Wind-swept, it was and

menacing beneath them. Europa was not all as they had first seen it.

A glimmer of brightness appeared at the horizon. The fleet was reducing speed and soon they saw that their journey was nearly over. At the far edge of the desert the bright spot resolved itself into the outlines of a city, the city of golden domes. Cones they looked like, rather, with rounded tops and fluted walls. The mental message had conveyed the most fitting description possible without words or picture.

The landing was over so quickly that they had but confused impressions of their reception. A great square in the heart of the city, crowded with people. Swooping maneuvers of hundreds of the bird-like ships. An open space for their arrival. The platform where a committee awaited them. The king, or at least he seemed to be king. The sea of upturned faces, staring eyes.

Mado fidgeted and opened his mouth to voice a protest but Carr nudged him into silence. The king had risen from his seat in the circle on the platform and was about to address them. There was no repetition of the telepathic means of communication.

"Welcome, travelers from the inner planets," said the king. He spoke Cos perfectly! "Cardos, emperor of the body you call Europa, salutes

you. Our scientists have recorded your thoughts with their psycho-ray apparatus and have learned that you have a message for us, a message we fear is not pleasant. Am I correct?"

Carr stared at the soft-voiced monarch of this remarkable land. It was incredible that he spoke in the universal language of the inner planets!

"Your Highness," he replied, "is correct. We have a message. But it amazes us that you are familiar with our language."

"That we shall explain later. Meanwhile—the message!"

"The message," Carr said, "is not pleasant. A golden sphere out in space. Helpless in the clutches of a nameless monster, a vast creature of jellylike substance but possessed of enormous destructive energy. A mental message to our vessel warning us away and bidding us to come here; to tell you of their fate. We escaped and here we are."

The face of Cardos paled. He reached for an egg-shaped crystal that reposed on the table; spoke rapidly into its shimmering depths. Hidden amplifiers carried his voice throughout the square in booming tones. It was a strange tongue he spoke, with many gutturals and sibilants. A groan came up from the assembled

multitude.

Cardos tossed the crystal to the table with a resigned gesture, then tottered and swayed. Instant confusion reigned in the square and the emperor was assisted from the platform by two of his retainers. They never saw him again.

One of the counsellors, a middle-aged man with graying russet hair and large gray eyes set in a perfectly smooth countenance, stepped from the platform and grasped the two adventurers as the confusion in the square increased to an uproar.

"Come," he whispered, in excellent Cos; "I'll explain all to you in the quiet of my own apartments. I am Detis, a scientist, and my home is close by."

Gently he clung to them as the larger men forced their way between the milling groups of excited Europeans. No one gave them much attention. All seemed to be overcome with grief. A terrible disaster, this loss of the golden sphere must be!

They were out of the square and in one of the broad streets. The fluted sides of the unpointed cones shone softly golden on all sides. Alike in every respect were these dwellings of the people of Europa,

and strangely attractive in the light of the mother planet.

Not a word was spoken when they reached the abode of their guide. They entered an elaborate hall and were whisked upward in an automatic elevator. Detis ushered them into his apartment when they alighted. He smiled gravely at their looks of wonder as they cast eyes on the maze of apparatus before them. It was a laboratory rather than a living room in which they stood.

Detis led them to an adjoining room where he bid them be seated. They exchanged wondering glances as their host paced the floor vigorously before speaking further.

"Friends," he finally blurted, "I hope you'll excuse my emotion but the news you brought is a terrible blow to me as to all Europa. Carli, our prince, beloved son of Cardos, was commander of the ship you reported lost. We deeply mourn his loss."

Carr and Mado waited in respectful silence while their host made effort to control his feelings.

"Now," he said, after a moment, "I can talk. You have many questions to ask, I know. So have I. But first I must tell you that Carli's was an expedition to your own worlds. A grave danger hangs

over them and he was sent to warn them. He has been lost. Our only space-ship capable of making the journey also is lost. Six Martian years were required to build it, so I fear the warning will never reach your people. Already the time draws near."

"A grave danger?" asked Mado. "What sort of a danger?"

"War! Utter destruction! Conquest by the most warlike and ambitious people in the solar system."

"Not the people of Europa?" asked Carr.

"Indeed not. There is another inhabited satellite of Jupiter, next farthest from the mother planet. Ganymede, you call it. It is from there that these conquerors are to set forth."

"Many of them?" inquired Mado.

"Two million or so. They're prepared to send an army of more than a tenth of that number on the first expedition."

"A mere handful!" Carr was contemptuous.

"True, but they are armed with the most terrible of weapons. Your people are utterly unprepared and, unless warned, will be driven

from their cities and left in the deserts to perish of hunger and exposure. This is a real danger."

"Something in it, Carr, if what he says is true. We've no arms nor warriors. Haven't had for two centuries. You know it as well as I do."

"Bah! Overnight we could have a million armed and ready to fight them off."

Detis raised his hand. "You offend me," he said gravely. "I have told you this in good faith and you reward me with disbelief and boastful talk. Your enemies are more powerful than you think, and your own people utterly defenceless against them."

"I'm sorry," Carr apologized, "and I'll listen to all you have to say. Surely your prince has not given his life in vain." He was ashamed before this scientist of Europa.

A tinkling feminine voice from the next room called something in the European tongue.

Detis raised his head proudly and his frown softened at the sound of dainty footsteps. His voice was a caress as he replied.

A vision of feminine loveliness stood framed in the doorway and the

visitors rose hastily from their seats. Carr gazed into eyes of the deepest blue he had ever seen. Small in stature though this girl of Europa was—not more than five feet tall—she had the form of a goddess and the face of an angel. He was flushing to the roots of his hair. Could feel it spread. What an ass he was anyway! Anyone'd think he'd never seen a woman in all his thirty-five years!

"My daughter, Ora, gentlemen," said Detis.

The girl's eyes had widened as she looked at the huge Martian with the funny black box on his back. They dropped demurely when turned to those of the handsome Terrestrial.

"Oh," she said, in Cos, "I didn't know you had callers."

CHAPTER VI

Vlor-urdin

The time passed quickly in Pala-dar, city of the golden domes. Detis spent many hours in the laboratory with his two visitors and the fair Ora was usually at his side. She was an efficient helper to her father and a gracious hostess to the guests.

The amazement of the visitors grew apace as the wonders of European science were revealed to them. They sat by the hour at the illuminated screen of the ruden, that remarkable astronomical instrument which brought the surfaces of distant celestial bodies within a few feet of their eyes, and the sounds of the streets and the jungles to their ears. It was no longer a mystery how the language of Cos had become so familiar to these people.

They learned of the origin of the races that inhabited Europa and Ganymede. Ages before, it was necessary for the peoples of the then thickly populated Jupiter to cast about for new homes due to the cooling of the surface of that planet. Life was becoming unbearable. In those days there were two dominant races on the mother body, a gentle and peaceful people of great scientific accomplishment and a race of savage brutes who, while very clever with their hands, were of lesser mental strength and of a quarrelsome and fighting disposition.

Toward the last the population of both main countries was reduced to

but a few survivors, and the intelligent race had discovered a means of traversing space and was prepared to leave the planet for the more livable satellite—Europa. Learning of these plans, the others made a treaty of perpetual peace as a price for their passage to another satellite—Ganymede. The migration began and the two satellites were settled by the separate bands of pioneers and their new lives begun.

The perpetual treaty had not been broken since, but the energies of the warlike descendants of those first settlers of Ganymede were expended in casting about for new fields to conquer. Through the ages they cast increasingly covetous eyes on those inner planets, Mars, Terra and Venus. Not having the advantage of the Rulden, they knew of these bodies only what could be seen through their own crude optical instruments and what they had learned by word of mouth from certain renegade Europeans they were able to bribe.

While their neighbors of the smaller satellite were engaged in peaceful pursuits, tilling the soil and making excellent homes for themselves, the dwellers on Ganymede were fashioning instruments of warfare and building a fleet of space-ships to carry them to their intended victims. It was a religion with them; they could think of nothing else. An unscrupulous scientist of Europa sold himself to them several generations previously and it was this scientist who had

made the plans for their space-fliers and had contrived the deadly weapons with which they were armed. He likewise taught them the language of Cos and it now was spoken universally throughout Ganymede in anticipation of the glorious days of conquest.

"You honestly believe them able to do this?" asked Carr, still skeptical after two days of discussion.

"I know it as a certainty," Detis replied solemnly. "It is only during the past generation we have learned of the completeness and awfulness of their preparations. Your people can not combat their sound-ray. With it they can remain outside the vision of those on the surface and set the tall buildings of your cities in harmonic vibrations that will bring them down in ruins about the ears of the populace."

There'll be nothing left for them to take if they destroy all our cities: nowhere for them to live. I don't get it."

"Only a few will be destroyed completely, to terrify the rest of the inhabitants of your worlds. Others will be depopulated by means of vibrations that will kill off the citizens without harming the cities themselves—vibrations which are capable of blanketing a large area and raising the body temperature of all living things therein to a

point where death will ensue in a very few minutes. Other vibrations will paralyze all electrical equipment on the planet and make it impossible for your ships of the air to set out to give battle, even were they properly armed."

"Looks bad, Carr," said Mado glumly.

"It does that. We've got to go back and carry the warning."

"I fear it is too late," said Detis. "Much time will be needed in which to develop a defense and surely it can not be done within the three isini before they set forth—about four of your days."

"They leave that soon?" Carr was taken aback.

"Yes, with their one hundred and twenty vessels; forty to each of your three planets; seventeen hundred men to a vessel."

Carr jumped to his feet. "By the heat devils of Mercury!" he roared, "well go to their lousy little satellite and find a way to prevent it!"

Ora gazed at his flushed face with unconcealed admiration.

"You're crazy!" exploded Mado. "What can we do with the *Nomad*?"

"Her D-ray can do plenty of damage."

"Yes, but they'd have us down before we could account for five of their vessels. It's no use, I tell you."

But Carr was stubborn. "We'll pay them a call anyway. I'll bet we can dope out some way of putting it over on them. Are you game?"

"Of course I'm game. I'll go anywhere you will. But it's a fool idea just the same."

"Maybe so. Maybe not. Anyway—let's go."

"Just a moment, gentlemen," Detis interposed. "How about me?"

Carr stared at him and saw that his eyes shone with excitement.

"Why, I believe you'd like to go with us!" he exclaimed admiringly.

"I would, indeed."

"Come on then. We're off." He was impatient to be gone.

Detis busied himself with a small apparatus that folded into a compact case, explaining that it was one that might prove useful. Ora left the room but quickly returned. She too carried a small case, and

she had donned a snug fitting leather garment that covered her from neck to knees.

"What's this?" demanded Carr. "Surely Miss Ora does not intend to come with us?"

"She never leaves my side," said Detis proudly.

"Nothing doing!" Carr stated emphatically. "There'll be plenty of danger on this trip. Well have no woman along—least of all your charming daughter."

Mado was leaving everything to his friend, but he grinned in anticipation when he saw the look of anger on the girl's face.

She stamped her little foot and faced Carr valiantly. "See here, Mr. Carr Parker!" she stormed. "I'm no weakling. I'm the daughter of my father and where he goes I go. You'll take me or I'll never speak to you again."

Carr flushed. He was accustomed to his own way in most things and entirely unused to the ways of the gentler sex. He could have shaken the little vixen! But now she was standing before him and there was something in those great blue eyes besides anger; something that set

his heart pounding madly.

"All right!" he agreed desperately, "have your own way."

He turned on his heel and strode to the door. Giving in to this slip of a girl! What a fool he was! But it would be great at that to have her along in the *Nomad*.

They found the public square deserted, the gilded dwellings hung with somber colors in mourning for Carli. Ora and Detis were very quiet and preoccupied when they entered the *Nomad*. The five isini of lamentation for the young prince had not yet passed.

The two Europeans were delighted with the appointments and mechanisms of the little vessel from Mars. They investigated every nook and cranny of its interior during the journey and were voluble in their praise of its inventor and builder. Neither had ever set foot in a space-flier and each was seized with a longing to explore space with these two strangers from the inner planets. They would make a couple of good vagabonds along with Mado and himself, Carr thought as they expressed their feelings. But there was more serious business at hand. They were nearing Ganymede.

"Where'll we land, Detis?" Mado called from the control cabin.

"Vlor-urdin. That is their chief city. I'll guide you to the location."

They took up their places at the ports and scanned the surface of the satellite as Mado dropped the ship into its atmosphere. A far different scene was presented than on Europa. The land was seamed and scarred, the colors of the foliage somber. Grays and browns predominated and the jungles seemed impenetrable. A river swung into view and its waters were black as the deepest night, its flow sluggish. A rank mist hung over the surface.

"The river of Charis!" exclaimed Detis. "Follow it, Mado. No, the other direction. There! It leads directly to Vlor-urdin."

By good chance they had entered the atmosphere at a point not far from their destination. In less than an hour by the *Nomad's* chronometer the towers of Vlor-urdin were sighted.

It was a larger city than Pala-dar and of vastly different appearance. A hollow square of squat buildings enclosed the vast workshops and storage space of the fleet of war vessels. Their huge spherical bulks rose from their cradles in tier after tier that stretched as far as the eye could reach when the *Nomad* had dropped to a level but slightly above the tips of the highest spires. The spires were everywhere, decorative towers at the corners of the squat buildings. Everything

was black, the vessels of the fleet, the squat buildings and the spires of Vlor-uridin. Death was in the air. Rank vapor drifted in through the opened ports. There was silence in the city below them and silence in the *Nomad*.

Ora shuddered and drew closer to him. Carr was aware of her nearness and a lump rose in his throat. A horrible fear assailed him. Fear for the safety of the dainty European at his side. He found her hand; covered it protectingly with his own.

CHAPTER VII

Rapaju

Detis was setting up and adjusting the complicated mechanisms of his little black case. A dozen vacuum tubes lighted, and a murmur of throbbing energy came from a helix of shining metallic ribbon that topped the whole. Flexible cables led to a cap-like contrivance which Detis placed on his head. He frowned in concentration.

"The psycho-ray apparatus." Ora explained. "He's sending a message to the city."

Evidently the influence of the ray was directive. They had no inkling of the thoughts transmitted from the alert brain of the scientist but, from the look of satisfaction on his face, they could see that he was obtaining the desired contact.

"Rapaju," he exclaimed, switching off the power of his instrument, "commander of the fleet of the Llotta. I have advised him of our arrival. Told him that a Martian and a Terrestrial wish to treat with him concerning the proposed invasion of their planets. His answering thought first was of fiercest rage, then conciliatory in nature. He'll receive you and listen to your arguments, though he promises nothing. Is that satisfactory?"

"Yes." Carr and Mado were agreed. At least it would give them a chance to look over the ground and to make plans, should any occur

to them.

The *Nomad* circled over the heart of the city and soon Mado saw a suitable landing space. They settled gracefully in an open area close by the building indicated by Detis as that of the administration officials of the city.

A group of squat, sullen Llotta awaited them and, without speaking a word either of hatred or welcome, led them into the forbidding entrance of the building. Close-set, beady eyes; unbelievably flat features of chalky whiteness; chunky bowed legs, bare and hairy; long arms with huge dangling paws—these were the outstanding characteristics of the Llotta. Mado stared straight before him, refusing to display any great interest in the loathsome creatures, but Carr was frankly curious and as frankly disapproving.

Rapaju leered maliciously when the four voyagers stood before him. He looked the incarnation of all that was evil and vile, a monster among monsters. Sensing him to be the more aggressive of the two visitors from doomed planets, he addressed his remarks to Carr.

"You come to plead with Rapaju," he sneered, his Cos tinged with an outlandish accent, "to beg for the worthless lives of your compatriots; for the wealth of your cities?"

"We come to reason with you," replied Carr haughtily, "if you are capable of reasoning. What is this incredible thing you are planning?"

Mado gasped at the effrontery of his friend. But Carr was oblivious of the warning looks cast in his direction.

"Enough of that!" snapped Rapaju. "I'll do the talking—you the reasoning. I've a proposition to make to you, and if you know what's best, you'll agree. Otherwise you'll be first of the Terrestrials to die. Is that clear?"

"Clear enough, all right," growled Carr. "What do you mean—a proposition?"

"Ha! I thought you'd listen. My offer is the lives of you and your companion in exchange for your assistance in guiding my fleet to the capital cities of your countries. Not that our plans will be changed if you refuse, but that much time will be saved in this manner and quick victory made certain without undue sacrifice of valuable property."

"You—you—!" Carr stammered in anger. But there was no use in raising a rumpus—now. They'd only kill him. Something might be

accomplished if he pretended to accede. "Go on with your story," he finished lamely.

"In addition to sparing your lives I'll place you both in high position after we seize your respective planets. Make you chief officers in the prison lands we intend to establish for your countrymen. What do you say?"

"Will you give us time to talk it over and think about it?"

"Until the hour of departure, if you wish."

Carr bowed, avoiding Mado's questioning eyes. He looked at Ora where she stood at the side of Detis. She flashed him a guarded smile. He knew that she understood.

Rapaju relaxed. He was confident he could bribe these puerile foreigners to help him in the great venture. And sadly he needed such help. The Llotta were not navigators. Their knowledge of the heavens was sadly incomplete. They had no maps of the surfaces of the planets to be visited. Their simultaneous blows would be far more effective and the campaign much shorter if they could choose the most vital centers for the initial attacks.

"Now," he said, "that we understand one another, let us talk further of the plans. Then you will be able to consider carefully before making your decision."

Rapaju could be diplomatic when he wished. Carr longed to sink his fingers in the hairy throat. But he smiled hypocritically and found an opportunity to wink meaningly at Mado. This was going to be good! And who knew?—perhaps they might find some way to outwit these mad savages. To think of them in control of the inner planets was revolting.

They retired to a small room with Rapaju and four of his lieutenants, Detis and Ora accompanying them. Ora sat close to Carr at the circular table in Rapaju's council. Carr thought grimly of the board meetings in far away New York.

Rapaju talked. He told of the armament of his vessels, painting vivid pictures of the destruction to be wrought in the cities of Terra, of Mars and Venus. His great hairy paws clutched at imaginary riches when he spoke glowingly of the plundering to follow. He spoke of the women of the inner planets and Carr half rose from his seat when he observed the lecherous glitter in his beady eyes. Ora! Great God, was she safe here? He stole a glance at the girl and a recurrence of the awful fear surged through him. In her leather garment, close

fitting and severe, she looked like a boy. Perhaps they would not know. Besides, there was the perpetual treaty with Europa. It always had been observed, Detis said.

As Rapaju expanded upon the glories to come he told perforce of many of the details of the plans. One thing stood out in Carr's mind: the vessels of the Llotta were not equal to the *Nomad* in many respects. They must carry their entire supply of fuel from the starting point and this was calculated as but a small percentage in excess of that required to carry them to their destinations. Their speed was not as great as the *Nomad's* by at least a third. If the *Nomad* led the fleet from Ganymede they might be able to get them off their course; cause them to run out of fuel out in the vacuum and absolute zero of space. He kicked Mado under the table and arose to ask a few leading questions.

Ora was whispering to her father and he nodded his head as if in complete agreement with what she was saying. These two were not deceived by his apparent traitorous talk, but Mado was aghast. Carr wondered if Rapaju believed him as did his friend.

"We'll do it, Rapaju," he stated finally. "In our ship, the *Nomad*, we'll guide you across the trackless wastes of the heavens. We'll take you to our capital cities; point out to you the richest of the industrial

centers. We have no love for our own worlds. Mado and I deserted them for a life of vagabondage amongst the stars. We ask no reward other than that we be permitted to leave once more on our travels, to roam space as we choose."

Mado attempted to voice an objection but Carr's hand was heavy on his shoulder. "Shut up, you fool!" he hissed in his ear. "Can't you trust me?"

Rapaju's eyes seemed to draw closer together as he returned Carr's unflinching stare. He walked around the table and stood at the side of the tall Terrestrial. Suddenly he grasped Ora's jacket, tore it open at the throat. He ran his hairy fingers over the bare shoulder of the shrinking girl and gurgled his delight at the velvet smoothness of her skin.

With a roar like a wild animal Carr was upon him, bearing him to the floor. His fingers were in that hairy throat, where they had itched to twine.

"Dirty, filthy beast!" he was snarling. "Lay your foul hands on Ora, will you? Say your prayers, if you know any, you swine!"

Then his muscles went limp and he was jerked to his feet by a

terrible force, a force that sent him reeling and gasping against the wall. One of Rapaju's lieutenants stood before him with a tiny weapon in his hand, the weapon which had released the paralyzing gas he breathed. He was choking; suffocating. A black mist rose before him. He felt his knees give way. Dimly, as in a dream, he saw that Ora was in Detis' arms. Rapaju was on his feet, fingering his neck and laughing horribly.

"The treaty, Rapaju!" Detis was shouting.

Ora was sobbing. Mado was in the hands of two of the vile Llotta, struggling wildly to free himself. The Martian's eyes accused him. He shut his own and groaned. Opened them again. But it was no use. Everything in the room was whirling now, crazily. He fought to regain his senses, crawled weakly toward the squat figure of Rapaju where it swayed and twisted and spun around. Then all was darkness. The gas had taken its toll.

CHAPTER VIII

The Expedition

Carr awakened to a sense of wordless disgust. Fool that he was to spill the beans as he had! All set to put one over on the leader of the Llotta, then to come a cropper like this! He knew he had been spared for a purpose. The gas was not intended to kill, only to render him helpless for a time. He opened his eyes to the light of a familiar room. He had awakened before in this bed. It was his own cabin on board the *Nomad*. What had happened? Had he dreamed it all. Europa, Ora, Rapaju—all of it? He sat up and felt of his aching head.

"Oh, are you awake?" a soft voice greeted him.

"Ora!" he exclaimed. It was indeed she, beautiful as ever.

"Sh-h," she warned, placing the tip of a finger to his lips. "They'll hear us."

"Who?" he whispered.

"Rapaju—his two guards. They're in the control cabin with father and Mado."

"What? They've taken the *Nomad*?"

"Yes. We're under way. They've forced Mado to guide them but do

not trust him. Rapaju spared you as he believes you more capable. He'll hold you to your word."

"Lord! But what are you doing here?"

Ora dropped her eyes. "He—Rapaju—" she said, "inferred from your action in assaulting him that you were very fond of me. He holds me as a hostage for your good behavior. Father volunteered to come along. He persuaded Rapaju to allow it. Swore allegiance to his cause. Of course he wouldn't leave me."

Carr gazed at her in admiration of her courage. She had been nursing him, too! What a girl she was!

"Ora," he said huskily, "Rapaju was right. I am fond of you. More than fond: I love you. I never knew I could feel this way."

"Oh Carr, you mustn't!" She drew back as he scrambled to his feet. "They'll find us. We must not show that we care. Rapaju is a beast. He wants me for himself and is delaying the time only until you have brought the fleet safely to the inner planets and to their great cities. He—"

"The skunk! Wants you himself, does he? Why, why didn't I kill

him? But Ora, you said—you do care—"

"Ha! I thought so!" Rapaju stood in the doorway, grinning mockingly at the pair. "The impetuous Terrestrial is up and about. Back at his old game!"

"Please, please, for my sake, Carr!" Ora pressed him back as he tensed his muscles for a spring.

"Sorry I was so slow," Carr grated, over her shoulder. "Another five seconds, Rapaju, and I'd have had your windpipe out by the roots."

Rapaju scowled darkly and fingered his throat. "But, my dear Carr, you were too slow," he said, "and I live—and shall live—while you shall die. Meanwhile you'll carry out your agreement. Come, Ora."

The girl hesitated a moment, then with a pleading glance at Carr stepped from the room.

"All right now, Parker," snapped Rapaju. "Into your clothes and into the pilot's seat. You'll stay there, too, till the journey's over. Get busy!"

One of his guards had appeared in the doorway. Carr knew that resistance was useless. Besides, seated at those controls, he might

think of something. Rapaju'd never get Ora if he could help it!

Mado's shoulders drooped and his face was haggard and drawn, but he summoned a smile when he saw Carr.

"Hello, Carr," he said. "You all right?"

"Sure. Rapaju says I've got to take the controls."

"Very well." Mado shrugged his broad shoulders and slipped from the pilot's seat. Two ugly Llotta guards were watching, ray-pistols in hand. "The chart is corrected, Carr, and—"

"Never mind the conversation!" Rapaju snarled. "There'll be no talk between you at all. Beat it to your cabin, Mado."

The Martian glowered and made as if to retort hotly.

"But Rapaju," Detis interposed, speaking from his position at one of the ports, "they'll have to consult regarding the course of the vessel. Mado is more familiar than Carr with the navigation of space."

"Shut up!" roared Rapaju. "I know what I am doing. And, what's more, you'll not converse with them, either! I'm running this expedition, and I'm not taking any chances."

Detis subsided and followed Mado through the passage to the sleeping cabins.

The ensuing silence was ominous. Carr could feel the eyes of the Llotta upon him as he examined the adjustments of the controls and peeped through the telescope. A glance at the velocity indicator showed him they were traveling at a rate of eight hundred miles a second. He studied the chart and soon made out their position. Jupiter was a hundred million miles behind them and they were heading almost due sunward. The automatic control mechanism was not functioning. Evidently Mado had kept this a secret—and for a purpose. He wished he could talk with his friend. They'd plan something.

"Like your job?" Rapaju was gloating over this Terrestrial who had dared to lay hands upon him.

"Yes, but not the company." Carr was disdainful.

"You'll like it less before I've finished with you. And get this straight. You think we're dependent on you to guide us to the inner planets, and that we'll not harm any of you until they are reached. Don't fool yourself! I've watched Mado and I've spent much time in the excellent library of the *Nomad*. I've learned plenty about the

navigation of space and can reach those planets as quickly and directly as you. But it pleases me to see you work, so work you shall. I'll check you carefully, and don't think you can deceive me. Don't try to depart from the true course. The sun is my check as it is yours, and I'll keep constant tab on our position. Get it?"

"A rather long speech, Rapaju." Carr grinned into the evil face of the commander.

"Still defiant, eh? Suits me, Carr Parker. We'll have some nice talks here, and then—when it pleases me—you'll suffer. You shall live to see your home city crash in utter ruin; your people slain, starved, beaten. And, above all, there's Ora—"

"Don't defile her name in your ugly mouth, you—!"

Carr bit his tongue to keep back the torrent of invectives that sprang to his lips. This would never do! He'd get himself bumped off before they were well started. And while there was life there was hope. He'd stick to his guns and think; think and plan. If only he could have a few words with Mado. They must get out of this mess. There must be a way! There must!

Rapaju was laughing in triumph. Thought he had cowed him, did he?

Boastful savage! If he could navigate the *Nomad* himself, why didn't he? Liar! He and Mado were godsend to him, and he knew it! His speech at the council table had been the real truth.

Foreign thoughts entered his mind. Detis, good old Detis, was using his thought apparatus in his own cabin! He paid no attention to the words of Rapaju when he left the control room. Detis was on the job! Between them they'd outwit this devil of Ganymede.

"Keep your courage," came the message. "I've read the thoughts of Mado and he bids you examine the chart carefully. He's made some notations in the ancient language of Mars. The automatic control of the *Nomad* can be used when necessary. He has not advised Rapaju of its existence."

Carr was encouraged and he concentrated on a suitable reply. But, though he did not consciously will it, his thoughts were of Ora.

Instantly there came the reassurance of her father. "Ora is not in immediate danger. Rapaju is saving her for his revenge on you. And I'm watching her constantly. A ray-pistol is concealed in my clothing, its charge ready for the foul creature in case he should lay hands on her. But you must plan an escape, and salvation for your worlds. Examine the chart at once."

He looked from the corner of his eye and saw that one of the Llotta guards was watching intently. He peered into the eye-piece of the telescope; made an inconsequential change in one of the adjustments. The guard stirred but did not arise. He looked at the chart with new interest, scanned its markings carefully. What had Mado marked for his attention? There were hundreds of notations, some in Cos and a few in the ancient Martian, all in Mado's painstaking chirography.

Ah, there it was! A tiny spot almost on their course, with Mado's minute notation. Sargasso Sea! What did it mean? Did Mado intend to lead the fleet into the embrace of that dreadful monster they had so fortunately escaped? An excellent idea to save the inner planets. But suicide for them! He'd do it though, if it weren't for Ora. She was so sweet and innocent. She must not die; must not suffer. Another way must be found. He groaned aloud as he realized that her predicament was the result of his own bullheadedness. If only he hadn't insisted on the trip to Ganymede. But then there was the problem of preserving the civilization of the inner planets. It had to be met.

There was a commotion behind him; a feminine shriek from the after cabins; loud shoutings from the beast called Rapaju. Carr's heart skipped a beat. He was paralyzed with fear. But only for an instant.

With a bellow of rage he whirled around and started for the door, charging the two guards with head down and arms flailing.

CHAPTER IX

Nemesis

The Llotta did not use their ray-pistols. They were too busy attempting to elude the mad rushes of the powerful Terrestrial. Besides, there were good reasons they should not kill him—yet. Carr drove one of them halfway down the passageway with a well-planted punch. The other was on his back, hairy legs twined around his waist, an arm under his chin, drawing his head back with a steady and terrible pressure. He whirled around, trying to shake off his beastly antagonist.

But these powerful legs and arms held fast. He tore at the hairy ankles where they crossed in the pit of his stomach; wrenched them free. Still the creature clung to him, twisting his head until it seemed his neck must break. He found a waving foot with his right hand; wrenched it mightily. There was a sharp snap and the foot dangled limp in his fingers. He had broken the ankle. With a howl of pain his assailant let go and dropped to the floor to crawl away like a whipped cur.

In a flash Carr saw that the brute was reaching for his ray-pistol where it had dropped during the encounter. He kicked it from the reach of that hairy paw and sprang after it. With one of those little weapons in his hands the odds would change! His fingers closed on its grip just as Ora rushed into the room, closely followed by Rapaju,

whose distorted features were terrible to behold. The cabin was full of them now; the guard he had first knocked down; the lust-crazed commander—the one with the broken ankle. All but Detis and Mado. Carr faced them alone.

So close was Rapaju to the girl that he dared not use the pistol, and now the uninjured guard was circling him, trying to get in a position where he could use his ray-pistol without endangering his commander. Carr fumbled for the release of the weapon he held in his hand; found it. The guard threw himself to the floor when he saw it raised; shouted a warning. But it was too late. The deadly ray had sped on its mission of death; struck him full in the middle. The twisted body lay still a moment and then collapsed like a punctured balloon, leaving his scant clothing in a limp heap—empty. A worthy miniature of the D-ray, this little weapon!

He turned to face Rapaju and saw that he was shielding himself with Ora's body. She had fainted and now hung drooping in the arms of the beast. Where was Mado? Detis? Good God—he'd killed them! Carr thought of that little spot on the chart. Must be very close now. They'd pass so near there'd be no escape. But he could not reach the controls without taking his eyes from Rapaju. That would have to wait.

Rapaju was backing toward the door, still holding the limp figure of the girl before him. The injured guard lay moaning on the floor.

"Drop her, you devil!" Carr shouted desperately as he saw that Rapaju soon would reach the passageway.

Then suddenly he reached for the controls and pushed the energy lever to full speed forward. He braced himself for the shock of acceleration and saw Rapaju and Ora thrown backward into the passageway, the girl's body cushioned by that of her captor as they were flung violently to the floor. Madly he rushed to the narrow entrance and tore at the hairy arms that encircled the slender waist of the girl. He jerked the snarling commander of the Llotta expedition to his feet and slammed him against the metal wall.

"Now, you damn pig," he grunted, "I'll finish the job. Dirty scum of a rotten world!"

He dragged his victim into the control cabin and threw him to the floor. But Rapaju was like an eel. He wriggled from under him and snatched from the heap of clothing the ray-pistol of the disintegrated guard. With a yelp of triumph he rose to his knees and leveled the weapon.

A well placed kick sent it spinning and Carr was upon him. He snapped back the head with a terrible punch; then lifted the dazed creature to his feet and stepped back.

"Stand up and take it like a man!" he roared.

Rapaju shook his head to clear it and rushed in with a bellow of rage. Just what Carr wanted! Starting almost from the floor, his right came up to meet the vicious jaw with a crack that told of the terrific power behind it. Lifted from his feet and hurled half way across the room by the impact, Rapaju lay motionless where he fell.

Carr was at the telescope. Their speed was close to fifteen hundred miles a second. The monstrous mass of Mado's Sargasso Sea loomed close in his vision. Off their course by a hundred miles or more. They'd miss it all right. He had the situation in hand now on board the *Nomad*. But how about the fleet behind them? He thought fast and furiously. Another two minutes and they'd pass the thing; the inexplicable horror which had accounted for the golden sphere of the Europeans. Could he use it? Suppose the fleet of the enemy—

The idea was full of possibilities.

He rushed to the stern compartment, and scanned the heavens for the

massed body of spheres he knew would be the fleet of the Llotta. At this speed they must have fallen far behind. Yes, there they were. Not so far behind at that. The battle in the control room must have been a shorter one than it had seemed. He returned quickly to the controls and reversed the energy, to give the fleet a chance to catch up to him.

Closer came that mass of whitish jelly. And now it was much larger than before. The terrible creature, for living matter it was, beyond doubt, was growing with the rapidity of a rising flood. Great tentacles of its horrid translucent substance reached in all directions for possible victims. He sickened at the sight. But what a fate for the fleet of the Llotta! If only he could maneuver them into its influence.

He changed his course slightly and headed directly for the monster, again increasing speed. Perhaps—if he calculated the forces correctly—he could dive through it again with the D-ray to clear a path. But no. It was a miracle they had escaped before, and now the vicious thing was more than double its previous size. Once more he altered his course. He'd cross in front of the thing; skim it as close as he dared and shoot from its influence on the far side. The greater mass of the enemy vessels and their lack of a quick-acting repulsive force would prove their undoing.

Full speed ahead. A rapid mental calculation—an educated guess, rather—and he set the automatic control. Turning around to start for the stern compartment, he saw that Ora had recovered from her swoon and now stood swaying weakly in the passageway.

"Ora!" he exclaimed delightedly. He rushed to her side and supported her in a tender embrace.

"Rapaju?" she questioned with horror in her eyes.

"Won't bother you for a while, dear. But your father—Mado?"

"He gassed them. They'll recover." The brave girl had regained her composure.

"Good! But, come! Time's short." He half carried her to the rear, berating himself the while for his inability to pay her closer attention. With arms still around her he placed her at one of the stern ports.

"What is it, Carr?" She sensed his excitement.

"The fleet—see! We'll destroy them."

The spherical vessels were close behind, huddled together in mass

formation and following the *Nomad* blindly.

"How, Carr?"

"Lead them into it. Wait till you see! There's a—"

The *Nomad* lurched, and changed direction. Cold fear clutched at his throat. That devil of a guard! Why hadn't he killed him? He dashed through the passage, Ora at his heels.

Sure enough, the crippled guard had dragged himself to the controls; was manipulating the energy director as he had seen Mado do. They were heading directly for the terrible monster of the heavens!

No need now to peer through the telescope. The thing was visible to the naked eye. No power could save them! Carr hurled himself at the guard and tore at the hairy paw which gripped the lever. The throbbing of strange energies filled the air of the room, and Carr's brain pulsed with the maddening rhythm. The red discharge appeared at the projections of the control panels. He forgot the fleet of the *Llotta*, forgot the menace to his own world. Only Ora mattered now, and he had not the power to save her!

As in a daze he knew he was wrenching mightily at the body of the

powerful minion of Rapaju. His fingers encountered heated metal—one of the ray-pistols. He felt the intense vibration of the weapon as its charge was released. But he still lived. The beast who held it had missed! Dimly he was conscious of the screams of Ora; of the yielding of the creature who fought him. An animal cry registered on his consciousness and he shook the suddenly limp Llotta from him. He knew somehow that his last enemy was gone.

A quick glance showed him that Ora was still on her feet, braced against the wall. The red veil was before his eyes. He grasped the controls, and fought desperately to keep his strength and senses. A streamer of horrid whiteness swung across his vision; slithered clammily over the glass of one of the forward ports. They were into the thing! It was the end! He groaned aloud as he fumbled with the mechanisms and strove to formulate a plan of escape.

The fleet, he knew, was just behind. An enormous mass. The repulsive energy astern would be terrific. He turned it full on. The whiteness obscured his vision. Then it was gone once more. A single streamer waved before him and encompassed them. The movement of these members must be inconceivably rapid, else they'd be invisible at the speed the *Nomad* was traveling. Full speed ahead. The repulsion full on in the direction of the center of the mass as well as astern. The framework of the *Nomad* creaked protestingly

from the terrific forces that tore at her vitals.

Then suddenly they were released. The *Nomad* was shooting off into space. The resultant of those combined forces had done the trick. Only the edge of that devil-fish of space, had they touched. Free—they were free of the monster! The red veil lifted. He rushed to Ora's side. She was kneeling at one of the floor ports, breathing heavily but unharmed.

Below them they saw the swiftly receding mass: the fleet of the Llotta diving headlong, drawn inexorably into the rapacious embrace of the vile creature of the heavens. An instant the awful whiteness of the thing closed in greedily about the many spheres of the fleet; swallowed them from sight and contorted madly and with seeming glee over the triumph. Then, in a burst of blinding incandescence, it was gone. The monster, the fleet—everything—blasted into nothingness. The fuel storage compartments of the vessels of Ganymede had exploded! The heavens were rid of the inexplicable growing menace; the inner planets were saved from a terrible invasion. And the *Nomad* was safe. Ora, Detis, Mado—all were safe!

At his side Ora was trembling. Gently he raised her to her feet, and took her into his arms.

CHAPTER X

Vagabonds All

Together they cared for Detis and Mado; made them comfortable in their bunks until the time when the effects of the gas would wear off. Lucky it was that Rapaju had used the gas pistol rather than the ray. Perhaps it had been a mistake. Or perhaps he had needed the scientific knowledge of Detis, the familiarity with the inner planets that was Mado's. At any rate, they had no delusions regarding his designs on Ora or his hatred of Carr. By his own passions had the commander of the fleet been led to the error that cost him his life and made possible the destruction of his fleet.

Carr was torn by conflicting emotions. The delectable little European was most disturbing. He'd never had much use for the other sex—on Earth. Too dominating, most of them. And always thrown at his head by designing parents for his money. But Ora was different! Her very nearness set his pulses racing. And he knew that she cared for him as he did for her. Those moments in the control cabin after the explosion! But something had come over him since he cut loose from the old life. Wanderlust—that was it. He'd never go back. Neither would he be content to settle down to a domestic life in Paladar. Wanted to be up and going somewhere.

"Oh, Carr, Carr!" Ora's voice called to him. "Mado is awake. He wants you."

Good old Mado! Why couldn't they just continue on their way as they had started out? Roaming the universe in search of other adventures! But the silvery tinkle of Ora's laughter reached his ears. She was irresistible! He forgot his doubts as he hurried to his friend's cabin.

Mado was staring at the European maiden with a ludicrous expression of astonishment—gawping, Carr called it. And Ora was laughing at him.

"Your friend," she gurgled, "doesn't believe he's alive, or that I am, or you. Tell him we are."

Carr grinned. Mado did look funny at that. "Hello, old sock," he said, "had a bad dream?"

"Did I? Oh boy!" Mado rocked to and fro, his head in his hands. Then he displayed sudden intense interest. "Rapaju?" he asked. "His guards—the fleet—what's happened?"

"Ah ha! Now you know you're alive!" Carr laughed. "But the others are dead and gone. The fleet's gone to smash—and how!"

"But Carr. How did you do it? Tell me!"

Mado threw off his covers and clapped his friend on the back, a resounding thump that brought a gasp from Ora.

"Your Sargasso Sea did it. And it's a thing of the past, too. Wait till I tell you about it!"

Ora tripped from the room as Carr sat on the edge of the bunk to spin his yarn.

"But man alive!" Mado exclaimed when the story was finished.

"Don't you know you've done a miraculous thing? I'd never have had the nerve. That damn creature out there had more than four times its former attracting energy. That's what made it impossible for the fleet to get away. And you—you lucky devil—you just doped it out right. The fleet of the Llotta gave you a tremendous push from astern when you used the repulsive energy. If they hadn't been there with their enormous mass to react against we'd all have been mincemeat now along with the Llotta. You Terrestrials sure can think fast! Me, now—Lord, if it had been me, I'd have thought of it after my spirit had departed to its reward—or punishment. Glory be! It's the greatest thing I ever heard of."

"Rats! You'd have done the same as I did. Probably would have missed it a mile instead of nearly getting caught as I did. A good

thing the fleet's gone, though. Mars and Terra—Venus, too—they'll never know how close it was for them. Wouldn't have sense enough to appreciate it, anyway."

"They would if they ever got a taste of what the Llotta planned. But what's wrong with you Carr? You act sore. Want to go home?"

"Me? Don't be like that. No—I'd like to carry on as we planned. There's Saturn, Uranus and Neptune yet; Planet 9; a flock of satellites and asteroids. Oh, dammit!"

Mado looked his amazement. "Well, what's to prevent it?" he demanded. "The *Nomad's* still here, and so are we. I'm just as anxious to keep going as you are. Why not?"

But Carr did not reply. Why not, indeed? He strode from the cabin and into the control room. The *Nomad* was drifting in space, subject only to natural forces that swung it in a vast orbit around the sun. He started the generators and drove the vessel from her temporary orbit with rapid acceleration. Out—out into the jeweled blackness of the heavens. There was Jupiter out there, a bright orb that came suddenly very near when he centered it on the cross-hairs of the telescope.

The excited voices of Ora and Detis came to his ears. The booming speech of Mado. Why couldn't he be sensible and companionable as they were? But a perverse demon kept him at the controls. They'd think him a grouch. Well, maybe he was! But the vastness of the universe beckoned. New worlds to explore; mysteries to be solved; a life of countless new experiences! Anyone'd think he was the owner of the *Nomad*, the way he planned for the future.

They were in the control cabin now—Mado and Detis and Ora. A moment he hesitated, eyes glued to the telescope. Then, with a petulant gesture, he reached for the automatic control; locked it. Shouldn't be this way. They'd think him an awful cad. And they'd be right! He whirled to face them.

Detis was smiling. Mado gazed owlishly solemn. Ora clung to the arm of her father, and her long lashes hid the blue eyes that had played such havoc with the emotions of the Terrestrial.

"Carr," said Detis, gently, "we must thank you. You saved our lives, you know."

"Aw, forget it. Saved my own, too, didn't I? By a lucky break."

"It wasn't luck, Carr." Detis was gripping his hand now. "It was sheer

grit and brains. You had them both. If you hadn't used them we'd all be corpses—or disintegrated—excepting Ora, perhaps. And you know the fate that awaited her. Instead, we are alive and well. The fleet is gone. Rapaju's body and that of his guard drift nameless in space where you disposed of them through the air-lock of the *Nomad*. The inner planets need fear no future invasion, for the resources of Ganymede have been expended in the one huge enterprise that has failed. All through your quick wit and bravery. No, it wasn't luck."

"Nonsense, Detis." Carr returned the pressure of the scientist's hand, smiling sheepishly. He pushed him away after a moment. He didn't want their gratitude or praise. Didn't know what he wanted. Ora still avoided meeting his gaze. "Nonsense," he repeated. "And now, please leave me. You, Detis. Mado, too. I'd like to be alone for a while—with Ora. Mind?"

Mado's owlish look broadened to a knowing grin as he backed into the passageway. Detis collided with the huge Martian in his eagerness to be out of the room. They were alone and Carr was on his feet. Nothing mattered now—excepting Ora. Suddenly she was in his arms, the fragrance of her hair in his nostrils.

Star gazing, the two of them. It was ridiculous! But the wonders of

the universe held a new beauty now for Carr. The distant suns had taken on added brilliance. Still they beckoned.

"Carr," the girl whispered, after a time, "where are we going?"

"To Europa. Your home."

"To—to stay?"

"No." Carr was suddenly confident; determined. "We'll stop there to break the news. Then we'll be wedded, you and I, according to the custom of your people. Our honeymoon—years of it—will be spent in the *Nomad*, roving the universe. Mado'll agree, I know. Wanderers of the heavens we'll be, Ora. But we'll have each other; and when we've—you've—had enough of it, I'll be ready to settle down. Anywhere you say. Are you game?"

"Oh, Carr! How did you guess? It's just as we'd planned. Father and Mado and I. Didn't think I'd go, did you, you stupid old dear?"

"Why—why Ora." Carr was stammering now. He'd thought he was being masterful—making the plans himself. But she'd beat him to it, the adorable little minx! "I was a bit afraid," he admitted; "and I still can't believe that it's actually true. You're sure you want to?"

"Positive. Why Carr, I've always been a vagabond at heart. And now that I've found you we'll just be vagabonds together. Father and Mado will leave us very much to each other. Their scientific leanings, you know. And—oh—it'll just be wonderful!"

"It's you that'll make it wonderful, sweetheart."

Carr drew her close. The stars shone still more brightly and beckoned anew. Vagabonds, all of them! Like the gypsies of old, but with vastly more territory to roam. The humdrum routine of his old life seemed very far behind. He wondered what Courtney Davis would say if he could see him now. Wordless happiness had come to him, and he let his thoughts wander out into the limitless expanse of the heavens. Star gazing still—just he and Ora.